Finch-Race, D. (2019). Editorial: Anglo-, Franco- and Italophone Poetics of Place, 1819-2019. *Nineteenth-Century Contexts*, *41*(1), 1-7. https://doi.org/10.1080/08905495.2018.1545436

Editorial: Anglo-, Franco- and Italophone Poetics of Place, 1819–2019

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Word Count
3968

Note on Contributor
Dr Daniel Finch-Race FHEA worked at the Universities of Cambridge, Southampton, Durham, and Edinburgh before joining the University of Bristol as a Vice-Chancellor's Fellow in October 2018. His primary research blends the environmental humanities with nineteenth-century French culture. His publications include articles in *French Studies Bulletin*, *Green Letters*, *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, *L'Esprit créateur* (with Valentina Gosetti), *Modern Language Review*, and *Romance Studies*. He co-edited *Textures* (Peter Lang, 2015) with Jeff Barda, *French Ecocriticism* (Peter Lang, 2017) with Stephanie Posthumus, and issues of *Dix-Neuf* ("Ecopoetics," 2015) and *L'Esprit créateur* ("French Ecocriticism," 2017) with Julien Weber.

To think through issues of place is to take stock of the climate crisis facing our planet. At this very moment, extreme weather and unprecedented levels of species extinction are substantiating humans' unsustainable conduct in numerous ecosystems, much of which is attributable to industrial practices. According to the International Commission on Stratigraphy's Anthropocene Working Group, "humanity is driving rapid and widespread changes to the Earth system that will variously persist and potentially intensify into the future" (Waters et al. 2016, 137). The severity of this impact on bionetworks across the world prompts us to consider the localized dimensions of long-term problems as a step toward greater sustainability.[*]

Although the risk of exceeding "planetary boundaries" is growing (Rockström et al. 2009, 472), conflicting attitudes about the macroscale science of environmental alterations continue to trouble the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (1988–), which is responsible for reports about greenhouse-gas emissions, in line with the *United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change* (1992). The IPCC's thirtieth anniversary has stoked concern about inaction on ecological issues at the highest tiers of politics: "UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres […] was alarmed by the paralysis of world leaders on what he called the 'defining issue' of our time" (McGrath 2018a). Many countries have yet to make a wholehearted effort to tackle emissions of greenhouse gases that were brought under scrutiny at the 2015 United Nations Climate Change Conference in Paris, which was the twenty-first such annual meeting: "the front line in the climate war has hardly moved […]. [Existing] commitments only represent a small portion of what is needed to limit global warming to less than two degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels, as enshrined in the 2015 Paris accord" (Agence France-Presse 2018). By not affording pride of place to combating climate change, world leaders are at risk of exposing our planet to massive degeneration.

During summer 2018, ecological issues came home to roost for policymakers in Italy, France and the United Kingdom. At the beginning of August, Italy's Prime Minister, Giuseppe Conte, confronted with a longstanding dispute over the Trans Adriatic Pipeline in the southern region of Salento, "made no commitment about changing the project" (Navach, Jones and Jewkes 2018). A week later, two doctors reproached the United Kingdom's Minister for Energy and Clean Growth, Claire Perry, over fracking at Preston New Road in Lancashire by "ask[ing] whether local people were being 'used as guinea pigs'" (BBC News 2018). In mid-September, France's Observatoire Climat-Énergie (Observatory on Energy and Climate) determined that Emmanuel Macron's administration "missed eight out [of] nine climate targets for 2017" (Sauer 2018). Around the same time, the European Social Survey, which carried out face-to-face interviews about attitudes and behaviors in 23 countries across Europe from August 2016 to December 2017, signaled that "just over a quarter of the respondents report[ed] being very or extremely worried about climate change" (Poortinga et al. 2018, 5). Regardless of widespread awareness of an environmental crisis, people at all levels of society appeared apathetic about making an effort to save the planet. On October 8, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change published a special report on *Global Warming of 1.5 °C* that highlighted the catastrophe likely to result from human activities raising our planet's average surface temperature at current rates. The report's sobering Summary for Policymakers heralded 10cm higher seas and the complete loss of Arctic sea ice in summer once per decade, unless a rise of only 1.5°C can be achieved through making "global net human-caused emissions of carbon dioxide (CO_2) […] fall by about 45 percent from 2010 levels by 2030" (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change 2018). In common with twenty years of such statements, high levels of emotion swirled around the severe announcement that had "the hallmarks of difficult negotiations between climate researchers determined to stick to what their studies have shown and political representatives more concerned with economies and living standards" (McGrath 2018b). In these ominous circumstances, the impetus to consider the place of the personal within the planetary came to feel all the more acute.

How might we address the global challenge of scientific knowledge not being taken seriously enough to inspire consistent action on environmental issues that range from soil erosion to water scarcity? To amend habitational and socioeconomic activities requires macro- *and* micro-level attentiveness to worldly dynamics: "understanding what anthropogenic climate change is[,] and how long its effects may last[,] calls for thinking on very large and small scales at once, including scales that defy the usual measures of time that inform human affairs" (Chakrabarty 2014, 3). This manner of considering the past, present and future in a far-reaching continuum would facilitate human-scale appreciation of a vast problem. More than ever, it is worthwhile to look at accounts of past environments, as well as ones likely to materialize, to have a sense of perspective on the demands of the present. Barbara Adam's *Timescapes of Modernity* (1998) highlights the importance of situating circumstances in a broad sweep of temporality:

> The scape—be this a landscape, seascape, or cityscape—arises from the interactive unity of observer and observed, of material phenomena and forces inaccessible to the senses, of visible and invisible influences. […] A timescape perspective enables us to integrate scientific and everyday knowledge, and the constitutive cultural Self within the workings of nature. It facilitates a recognition of the clashes and stresses that tend to be left implicit in both classical science analyses and political debates. […] It explicitly incorporates […] situations characterised by indeterminacy, time-lags of unspecifiable durations and open dispersal in time and space. (54–55)

This consideration of human-environment relations grounds us in time and the world, with a long view of the planet's evolution beyond a dichotomy of nature and culture. The call to place experiences in relation to varied bodies of knowledge articulates the value of uniting science- and humanities-based approaches to deal with our changing environment's complex evolution over a period beyond the short-term horizons of daily life, as typified by a news cycle or a political mandate.

The humanities are key to opening up sources of meaning beyond scientific texts, not least literary and pictorial works that are symptomatic of reactions to environmental alterations. As a complement to data gleaned from experiments and empirical observation, readings of cultural production through the lens of disciplines such as art history and philosophy illustrate that "being co-constituted with the world, ontologically inseparable, just seems to be our condition" (Shotwell 2016, 7). Such recognition of human existence in common with the rest of the planet brings a personal dimension to the grand narrative of scientific proof concerning industrial societies' culpability for precipitating an environmental crisis. In a gesture toward the pressing need to address our co-constituted biosphere from multiple perspectives, UNESCO's three-year *Strategy for Action on Climate Change* (2017) signals the importance of "promoting interdisciplinary climate knowledge […] for climate change mitigation" (2). Scientific approaches to ecological issues benefit from a close rapport with cultural analysis of individual experiences, shared values, and contested ideas because joining up human feelings with the realities of our world enables an emotional engagement with climate change.

Evidence of the emotive stakes of ecological issues is found in community-driven responses to contemporary situations in Italy, France and the United Kingdom. Since March 2018, hundreds of Italians have been resisting the company behind the Trans Adriatic Pipeline in its attempts to get rid of swathes of olive trees in Salento that "are the backbone of the economy in the area[,] […] carry strong cultural value for local people and are hundreds (some thousands) of years old" (350.org 2018). In summer 2018, the prospect of fracking in northeastern England diminished due to Third Energy's inability to obtain planning permission in Yorkshire, largely attributable to "half a decade [of] local communities […] that have stood in the way of ministers seemingly hell-bent on tearing up our climate targets[,] and fossil fuel corporations determined to prise every penny of profit from our warming planet" (Lucas 2018). On 13–14 October 2018, France witnessed major rallies demanding greater action on climate change for the second time in two months, with "over 14,500 people march[ing] in Paris[;] […] 10,000–15,000 people in Lyon; 3,200 people in Lille; 2,500 in Bordeaux; 1,850 in Strasbourg; 3,000–4,000 in Rennes; and around 500 in Marseille" (The Connexion 2018). These reactions to acute problems highlight widespread motivation to confront climate change, though such momentum often relates to a particular occurrence. The humanities can help to channel this energy into a long-term commitment by advancing emotional responses to questions of place, as demonstrated by European initiatives that have been underway for the best part of a decade. In Italy, "social movements of Campania […] are fighting waste contamination by establishing social cooperatives and pedagogical initiatives" (Paolo De Rosa and Velegrakis 2014). The United Kingdom has "the Whispering Woods, a performance group of aerialists, musicians and storytellers that create one-off shows out in the landscape. […] Telling these tales is important medicine in our times. These stories also connect us with the cycles of the seasons" (Brambrey 2016, 9). Regional ecologies are gaining recognition through "'farm to school' programmes in […] France [that] prioritize sustainable locally grown foods in school canteens" (Carrau et al. 2018, 10). Non-profit organizations such as Wild-Touch are seeking to improve participation

in sustainable development through short films in multiple languages that involve celebrities like Marion Cotillard narrating global warming: "since the Industrial Era, human activity has released a massive quantity of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. Carbon dioxide, a powerful greenhouse gas, has continually been accumulating, to the point of changing our climate" (Wild-Touch 2015, 2:15–2:40). This spectrum of activities reveals rich possibilities for using humanities-based methods to facilitate concerted involvement in science by heightening people's sense of place.

Several publications in recent years signify that research in Place Studies is on the rise in disciplines ranging from modern languages to "all branches of social sciences" (Lewicka 2011, 207). A representative example from 2016 is the special issue of *Philosophy Activism Nature* on "Place" that pointed out fruitful intersections between geographical frameworks and the emotional dimensions of creative works. The guest editors emphasized that "the coming together of the manifold kinds of biotic and abiotic existence that are familiar through the medium of subjective human experience—and its literary and essayistic modes of representation—collectively produces notions of the ever-unfolding and plural becomings of 'place'" (Bristow and Pearce 2016, 1). This recognition of numerous factors contributing to the dynamics of place indicates the extent to which our world is shaped by an array of human and non-human elements in constant evolution. There is also a prompt to understand cultural artefacts, such as poems, as renderings of ecological circumstances in a distinctive setting. Feelings emerge as fundamental to all interactions with environments: "places are […] shaped by particular emotional experiences. […] [A] *sense of place* is shaped by the physical environment; place-making, likewise, is an assemblage of human and non-human events" (Bristow and Pearce 2016, 1). A two-way dynamic is apparent, in that an emotional state has roots in a place's ecological circumstances, just as a place's identity revolves around emotional and ecological considerations. The concept of place-making as processual in nature feeds into reflections on creative works as sites of identity formation, with content and style not only influenced by, but also influencing, our relation to the world.

To contextualize the poetics of place within recent history, we can look to the nineteenth century as a key phase, particularly regarding Romanticism. Anglophone poems by authors such as William Wordsworth (1770–1850) convey the intricacies of human-environment relations: "in their thinking on the poetics of place, the [R]omantics conjoined a sense of the power of memory and imagination to refashion reality with an appreciation of the power of place to alter human moods and sensibilities" (Rigby 2004, 13). On the one hand, human agency comes to the fore in such depictions of a place in line with a poet's feelings. On the other hand, representations of a locale affecting a poet's mood provide evidence of human existence being enmeshed with matters of climate. These dynamics denote an enduring preoccupation with people's connections to their surroundings: "poets […] are not exactly philosophers, though they often try to explain the world and humankind's place within it. […] [T]hey are often exceptionally lucid or provocative in their articulation of the relationship between internal and external worlds" (Bate 2000, 251). Such explorations of personal experiences in conjunction with ecological circumstances have brought to light emotional and environmental states that continue to preoccupy a broad spectrum of people, not least scientists. Mina Gorji's article in this issue focuses on the poetry of Christina Rossetti (1830–1894) in the light of questions related to situatedness, belonging, and the place of the poetic voice. Her study of Rossetti's polyvalent prepositions highlights the rich textures of a corpus with a reputation for opacity. This focus on a key aspect of grammar heightens our appreciation of a poem's spatial features beyond the function of depicting a place. The poet consequently emerges as a metaphysical thinker whose sensitivity to proximity and distance

was as much about spiritual dimensions as physical ones. Following Gorji's analysis, Stephen Regan's article attends to Rossetti's poetry alongside verse by Alfred Tennyson (1809–1892) and Thomas Hardy (1840–1928). Close readings of key elegies evince a genre with increasingly localized poetics of internal and external landscapes that simultaneously encourage and oppose consolation. The examination of geographical settings and diction demonstrates that post-Romantic poems privilege demythologized landscapes, rather than the stylized visions of prior elegies. Rhythm and rhyme prove to be important elements that spatialize loss within the composition of such poetry. In the subsequent article, Tom Bristow compares the poetry of John Clare (1793–1864) and John Ashbery (1927–2017). This consideration of the two poets, which revolves around localized loss as a window onto the world's contingent nature, highlights a break from expressions of lived realities according to an introspective selfhood. The Anthropocene is signaled as an epoch requiring the pastoral to be decolonized as part of a movement toward inclusiveness and appreciation of the more-than-human. In the end, poems from two centuries and two continents suggest that place comes to be articulated most frequently through connections, not constraints.

Italophone culture is a multifaceted repository of insights about place in the nineteenth century, especially with the Kingdom of Italy coming into being in 1861. The poetry of writers like Alessandro Manzoni (1785–1873) refers to sites of sociopolitical significance entwined with geographical status: "there are places that can gather experiences, dynamics, and symbols as to also enlighten the life of other places, of other collectives […]. These places are at once territory and map, individual sites and cognitive instruments" (Iovino 2016, 2). Landscapes around cities such as Naples and Florence have been touchstones for diverse phases of place-making throughout the peninsula since antiquity. Each territory's composite identity brings to mind stratum upon stratum of societies and initiatives shaping, and being shaped by, the environment. Such locations have come to possess traits that are apt to be read in the manner of a poem or an artwork: "'text' can […] be […] the *material texture* of meanings, experiences, processes, and substances that make the life of places and beings. A text, in this sense, emerges from the encounter of actions, discourses, imagination, and physical forces that congeal in material forms" (Iovino 2016, 3). This understanding of materiality draws out ecological and semiotic elements that have made up cultural artefacts and real-world environments in a similar measure across centuries. Davide Messina's article in this issue unites poetry by Giacomo Leopardi (1798–1837) and visual art by Mark Rothko (1903–1970) in a deliberation on disruptions of spatial coordinates. The transposition of infinite creativity into a finite world is shown to be a decisive factor in the compositional and connotative textures of the two forms of place-making within material confines. In a challenge to recognizable models of understanding the world, nothingness and abstraction come to be constitutive of a movement toward an uncanny sublime. Inversional styles of creativity thus contribute to a mode of structural tragedy that is common to the two figures spanning the best part of 175 years.

Nineteenth-century Francophone texts provide a wealth of perspectives on places as varied as Belgium and colonial Algeria. Writings by poets including Marie Krysinska (1857–1908) exhibit dynamic identities emerging from a far-reaching continuum of creative works steeped in geographical concerns: "poetry […] become[s] the vehicle for a certain kind of imagining of French place" (Mackenzie 2011, 17). With roots extending at least to the sixteenth century, this concept of a poem as a distinctive means of rendering environmental matters has complexified since the advent of heavy industry, as French culture has grown ever more heterogenous in nature. Because regional ways of life have been compelled to compete with currents of centralization and globalization to a greater and greater extent, the critical

significance of localized characteristics has increased. Francophone poetry has an extensive record of figuring this tension in thematic and compositional terms: "lyric places […] are very often regional before they are national, or they show the nation to be constituted by an aggregate of entrenched local identities" (Mackenzie 2011, 8). By providing space for the specific in place of the general, environmentally oriented poems have long conveyed the complexity of areas and communities grouped under sociopolitical and linguistic banners. Heather Williams's article in this issue deals with the particularities of Brittany and Wales in representations by Jules Michelet (1798–1874), revised at length by his widow Athénaïs Michelet (1826–1899). In-depth explorations of this material, which is saturated with environmental and semiotic markers, illuminate the poetic qualities of pieces of travel writing. Celticity's fluctuating status in France over six decades comes to the fore in the transformation of personal reflections into a form destined for consumption by an urbane audience. Quasi-colonialist attitudes about otherness ultimately surface from wistful representations of places subjected to sociocultural and linguistic homogenization by the national government. After Williams's reflections, Sarah Gubbins's article concentrates on the poetry and travel writing of Gérard de Nerval (1808–1855). Her meditation emphasizes the spatial qualities of structure and language in sonnets filled with references linking French culture to places in western Asia and beyond. This practice's relative success, which the brief form of verse makes possible, contrasts with the noticeable problems in the writer's prose about Eastern traditions that seeks to establish similarities with European manners and customs. A synthesis between Eastern and Western aesthetics transpires to be a bridge too far, since the complexity of otherness cannot be conveyed in imaginary itineraries that afford pride of place to the West. In the concluding article of this issue, Daniel Finch-Race explores the gritty metropoetics of versified portrayals of London by Ada Cambridge (1844–1926) and Émile Verhaeren (1855–1916). Close readings of poetry in English and French trace common concerns about the Victorian capital in depictions produced outside the focalized space toward the end of the 1880s. This transnational perspective opens up the authors' respective concerns about injustice and pollution in relation to sociocultural and ecological circumstances in Australia and Belgium. Across the two accounts, differences in perceptual and topographical coordinates underscore the importance of the personal amid the swirl of industrial modernity. As every article in this issue demonstrates, such place-based emotion acts as a foundation for concerted engagement with environmental issues that are more pressing than ever in our age of perilous changes in climate.

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* This journal issue is the prime outcome of the conference on "Nineteenth-Century Poetics of Place" at Durham University's Hatfield College on 22 June 2018 (#C19PoeticsPlace). Generous support for the event came from Hatfield College's Master and catering team, Durham University's International Office, the Society for French Studies, the Arts and Humanities Research Council's Northern Bridge Doctoral Training Partnership, the Arts and Humanities Research Council's network on "Contemporary French Poetic Practice," and Le Service Enseignement Supérieur, Recherche et Innovation de l'Ambassade de France au Royaume-Uni. During autumn 2018, the University of Edinburgh's Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities provided the means to finalize the collection of articles by way of an Environmental Humanities Visiting Research Fellowship. I am very grateful to Tom Bristow, Mina Gorji, Sarah Gubbins, Davide Messina, Stephen Regan, and Heather Williams for contributing affably and efficiently to this project, not least through their comments on each other's drafts.